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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001071

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/23/2019  
TAGS: [PHUM PREL UN PINR BM KN BG IR](#)  
SUBJECT: BACK TO THE FUTURE? BANGLADESH SWITCHES UN VOTE  
ON NORTH KOREA, MAINTAINS ITS POSTURE ON BURMA AND IRAN

REF: A. DHAKA 1039  
[1B. SECSTATE108921](#)  
[1C. DHAKA832](#)

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Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary  
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[11.](#) (C) In a return to the position of the previous democratically elected government, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) chose to abstain on a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution condemning the human rights situation in North Korea. By doing so, the Government reversed the stance taken by the military backed Caretaker Government in 2007 and 2008, when it had voted in favor of the resolution. According to the Director General of the Americas and Pacific Wing of Bangladesh,s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Ali Sorcar, this vote represented a return to Bangladesh,s principled stance of opposition to country specific resolutions. Separately, the GOB voted against similar resolutions on Burma and Iran. These moves were taken despite the fact that the Foreign Minister had assured the Ambassador she would instruct the GOB,s Permanent Representative in New York to abstain on Burma and Iran, and issue country specific statements.

Principled opposition?  
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[12.](#) (C) Foreign Secretary Mohamed Mijarul Quayes signaled the GOB,s stance on the North Korea, Iran and Burma resolutions when he questioned the value of country-specific resolutions in a November 15 meeting with the Ambassador (Ref A). Quayes expressed concern about the condition of human rights in Burma, Iran and North Korea but questioned the value of passing more UNGA resolutions. He said Bangladesh opposed country-specific resolutions because they appeared selective and inconsistent and added the focus should be on achieving the best possible outcomes.

[13.](#) (C) Americas Director General Sorcar told PolCouns on November 20 that the GOB's decision to abstain on the North Korea resolution was simply a return to the country,s

previous stance of opposing country specific resolutions in the UNGA. He said votes in favor of resolutions condemning North Korea over the last two years were aberrations of Bangladesh,s unelected Caretaker Government.

...Or fear?

14. (C) On the Burma and Iran resolutions, Sorcar said the GOB could not support or abstain on them out of fear of the impact it would have on bilateral relations with each country. (Note: Bangladesh also typically votes with Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) countries, though on Iran the OIC did not vote as a bloc. End Note.) He suggested that Bangladesh would work through other groupings, including the UN Human Rights Council, to address its concerns regarding the human rights record of Burma and Iran. PolCouns noted our disappointment at the abstention on North Korea and our understanding that GOB leaders were committed to working more closely with the United States in multilateral fora. He also noted that votes against the resolutions would damage our growing and productive relationship with Bangladesh.

Revenge of the bureaucrats

15. (C) The position taken by Bangladesh followed a full court press by Embassy Dhaka to persuade the GOB to vote in favor of all three resolutions. Bangladesh,s voting record on the resolutions also contradicted Foreign Minister Dipu Moni,s pledges to the Ambassador. The Ambassador phoned the Foreign Minister prior to the vote on Burma and Iran. She pledged to instruct her Permanent Representative in New York to abstain on Burma and Iran and issue country specific

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statements explaining their position.

Comment

16. (C) Bangladesh,s recent UNGA votes demonstrated the ability of bureaucrats to undermine decisions made by GOB Ministers. The outcome in this case is troubling because it allows countries like Burma and Iran a free pass on human rights violations. Moreover, it demonstrates the GOB's reluctance to act independently, even on the Iran resolution, on which many other OIC nations took independent stances. Post will continue to press the GOB to act as a responsible partner on important UN votes.  
MORIARTY